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### **Testimony Submitted to the General Law Committee March 11, 2014 House Bill 5476**

#### **“An Act Concerning a Study of the Feasibility of Legalizing Industrial Hemp”**

Senator Doyle, Representative Baram, Senator Witkos, Representative Carter and distinguished members of the General Law Committee. The House Republican Caucus would like to comment on House Bill 5476, An Act Concerning a Study of the Feasibility of Legalizing Industrial Hemp. The House Republican Caucus would also like to take this opportunity to thank the General Law Committee for raising House Bill 5476 for a public hearing.

Industrial hemp is grown across the world and is commonly used in many products within the United States such as rope, clothing, soap, and even as a substitute for fiberglass in auto parts. Unfortunately, at this time, hemp must be outsourced from countries such as China, Canada, and Eastern Europe to fulfill our country's need for the product. Currently, the United States is both the world's largest consumer of hemp and the only industrialized nation in the world that bans the cultivation of hemp.

Industrial hemp refers to a type of Cannabis plant that contains low levels of the psychoactive chemical tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and can be used to produce a variety of products including textiles, plastics, fuel and food. Presently, the federal government bans the cultivation of hemp because it contains THC. Marijuana and industrial hemp are both cannabis plants; however, the chemical makeup of the two plants vastly differs. Additionally, unlike marijuana, an individual cannot achieve a high from hemp.

Recently, there has been a dramatic policy shift within the country regarding the legalization and use of marijuana. As states within the country increasingly explore the legalization of marijuana, the legalization and cultivation of hemp may be closer than we realize. Currently nine states including California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Vermont and West Virginia have passed laws regarding the promotion and marketing of industrial hemp. Additionally, Hawaii has gone one step further by having passed legislation authorizing privately-funded industrial hemp research. Moreover, the 2014 Farm Bill agreement brought to the forefront industrial hemp by allowing institutions of higher education and state departments of agriculture to grow or cultivate industrial hemp. Furthermore, Connecticut is among 28 legislatures within the country considering bills on the subject of industrial hemp this legislative session.

HB 5476 is a House Republican Caucus proposal to further investigate industrial hemp. The proposal requires the Commissioners of Consumer Protection and Economic and Community Development to study the feasibility of legalizing the production, possession and sale of industrial hemp, including 1) defining industrial hemp in statute; 2) legalizing industrial hemp; and 3) developing a licensing system.

Legalization of industrial hemp will encourage economic development within the state of Connecticut by creating a vibrant new cash crop for farmers. Not only can hemp be grown quickly and economically within the state, United States manufacturers that solely rely on outsourced hemp will finally have a domestic source for the product. This is an unprecedented opportunity to stay ahead of the curve on the cultivation of industrial hemp within the state of Connecticut and to understand the true nature of industrial hemp and how it could help manufacturers, farmers, and consumers, alike.

House Republicans thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of this important initiative, and we urge the committee to support HB 5476, An Act Concerning a Study of the Feasibility of Legalizing Industrial Hemp.